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SUBJECT: UGANDA'S POPULATION BOOM JEOPARDIZES DEVELOPMENT GAINS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Two new demographic studies in Uganda show that the country has one of the highest population growth rates in the world, creating a demographic time bomb which threatens to undermine Uganda's recent economic gains and political stability. According to one study, Uganda's population increased by 3.2%, or one million people, to 29.6 million during 2007. Another study shows that between now and 2050, Uganda is expected to have the highest population increase in the world, with total population rising by 263% to nearly 78 million. Together, the reports stand as a strong rebuke to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's pro-growth position on population and highlight challenges that the Government of Uganda must address immediately. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Uganda's population increased by 3.2%, or one million people, to 29.6 million during 2007, according to a report released by Uganda's Population Secretariat at the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development on November 11. The report, "The State of Uganda Population Report 2008," published with support from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), provides evidence that the rapid rate of population growth is already creating deleterious effects throughout society and the economy. Twelve percent of women of reproductive age are undernourished, it states, while 38% of children under five years old demonstrate stunted growth. Government policy makers will face increasing social conflict over access to land, employment, energy, clean water, education, housing, transportation, and health services, as well as greater food insecurity because the subdivision of farms among competing heirs will cause lower agricultural productivity. The report urges the GOU to work deliberately to ensure a sustainable population growth rate, particularly by increasing contraceptive use, which currently stands at only about 24% among married women.

¶3. (U) According to a second report, published by the non-governmental Population Reference Bureau (PRB), Uganda's ratio of those not in the labor force compared to those currently working is the highest in the world at 116%. Forty-nine percent of the population is below 15 years old. The contraceptive "unmet need" (defined as the percentage of women of reproductive age who do not want more children but are not using any form of contraception) of Ugandan women stands at 34.6%.

¶4. (SBU) Both reports challenge Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's own pro-growth position on population. Museveni, who gained power when the country was depopulated after years of conflict, continues to advocate population growth in order to spur economic growth and expand markets. "The wealth of a nation is not in the soils and stones," he stated in July 2008. "It is in its people, its population. I do not agree with the alarmism over the high rate of population growth." Such comments come despite ample evidence that the country's rapidly growing population is overwhelming Uganda's infrastructure, social services, and educational institutions. Further, the Ugandan President has yet to acknowledge the growing body of evidence demonstrating that demographic "youth bulges," coupled with high unemployment rates, have the potential to seriously undermine a country's development and political stability by generating higher levels of crime, political violence, and terrorism.

15. (SBU) Comment: The Population Secretariat's report is evidence that at least some GOU officials understand Uganda's demographic challenges, but Museveni's own staunch, pro-growth position is alarming. While the GOU has developed policies for reproductive health and family planning, in coordination with UNFPA and donors including USAID, political commitment to implementation of those policies is lacking. The GOU has not spent funds on contraceptive commodities in the past two years, for example, and few high-level officials outside of the Population Secretariat have ever made statements contradicting the President's position on this issue. Both UNFPA and USAID have current programs with elements to provide family planning services. USAID allocated \$10 million to programs aimed at strengthening family planning services in 2008 and will award a \$39 million five-year project in early 2009 to focus on family planning and child survival in 15 of Uganda's 80 districts. The PEPFAR program also spent \$2 million on condom procurement for HIV prevention in 2008. While such donor programming is a step in the right direction, all of Uganda's political and economic gains of recent years are in jeopardy if the GOU does not adjust course and take action now to address its impending demographic disaster. End comment.
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